Only in the southeast are there well marked topographic boundaries, with the upper reaches of the Namoi, Macquarie and Bogan Rivers, and with the Warrumbungles and the Nandewar ranges in the east separating the region from New England. Liverpool Plain has been included here, bounded on the south by the Liverpool Range. The western boundary recognises increasing aridity; the shire subdivision does not permit use of the boundary of the Western Division which is topographically well-defined.

The whole area is given unity by the rivers draining to the Upper Darling River and the great area of alluvial soils which these braided meandering rivers produce. These alluvials, ranging from deep open alluvial soils (black earths) on Liverpool Plains to sandy and gravelly ridges have been deposited by the Bogan, Castlereagh, Macquarie, Barwon, Namoi and Gwydir Rivers. There are some distinctive subregions, such as Liverpool Plains, Macquarie Marshes and Pilliga Scrub. There are many tributaries and billabongs.

Farming is devoted to sheep grazing for wool, wheat and cotton-growing, with increasing amounts of oil and fodder grains. Oats are grown in the east, where also fat lambs are reared.

To the west the vegetation enters the area of mulga-acacia scrub of the semi-arid plains. In the centre and east, savannah woodland predominated, though now much cleared. Black Cypress Pine and Forest Red Gum occur on ridges and in the Pilliga Scrub along with Ironbark and Bloodwood. For the most part, Box associations predominate. There were extensive Mitchell Grass plains, as on Liverpool Plains.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

CITIES
Dubbo, Tamworth

SHIRE
Bogan, Coolah, Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Gilgandra, Gunnedah, Moree Plains, Narrabri, Narramine, Nundle, Parry, Quirindi, Warren, Yallaroo.
This region embraces all that relatively level country drained to the Darling by the upper Bogan, the Macquarie, Castlereagh, Gwydir, Namoi and Macintyre rivers and Boomi creek. Emerging from the passes over Liverpool Range one can see the 'sunlit plains extended', but this country can be harsh in drought: Henry Lawson could write in 1892 that 'the bush between Bathurst and Bourke is horrible. Draw a wire fence, and a few ragged gums, and add some scattered sheep running away from the train. Then you'll have the bush all along the NSW western line from Bathurst to Bourke'. He wrote of the railway towns 'consisting of a public house and a general store, with a square tank and a school-house on piles in the near distance', a harsh forbidding landscape. If the bush was to make poetry, it would not be here. These plains have attracted no regional historian, though local histories of some places, now mature towns, demonstrate local pride.

The plains were the vast range of the Kamilaroi tribe and its many sub-branches. Sturt found the blacks on the Macquarie river clean-limbed and stout, with pleasing and intelligent countenances. Nevertheless, when the country was occupied, there was fierce resistance. The tale of murder and massacre was half hidden, but at least the Myall Creek massacre in 1838 is documented, when seven settlers were convicted and hanged in Sydney. Eric Rolls records a 'battle' at Boorambil near the Pilliga Scrub. Simpson Davison recorded that when he took up his run on the Macintyre, he found two shepherds speared, and the graves of five others similarly disposed of. 'The blacks are daily becoming more audacious' was a report of 1842, and travellers' records of the time clearly indicate a fear of the Aborigines. The conflict was worse on the Gwydir and Namoi rivers, where conflicting reports suggest at least 25 Europeans were killed, and much loss of stock, while many Aborigines and settlers were wounded. The native police were sent to the area in 1849. Within six years Aboriginal resistance was quelled. Aborigines, those remaining, worked as stockmen, at shearing and mustering, and in domestic services. To the west, the Bogan Aborigines were so fierce that government forbade settlement for fourteen years, by when the tribes were weakened by disease.

The region was discovered by John Oxley, who was blocked by the Macquarie Marshes, then full, and made his way eastward across the region, finding the Castlereagh and Peel rivers, naming Liverpool Plains, and ascending into New England. Sturt in 1827-9 descended the Macquarie and Castlereagh rivers and found them to flow into the Darling, but already the first squatters were over Liverpool Range. Mitchell in 1831 found the Namoi about the site of Boggabri, and went on to the Gwydir and the Macintyre, returning to report good pastoral land. Coxen explored the Namoi Plains further in 1835, reporting it all dead flat with few trees. Here was an area where exploration was useful to the squatters who came behind and who knew what to expect.

**PASTORALISM**

The pastoralists entered from the south, either from the Hunter Valley by the pass at the head of Page's river or the pass from Cassilis to Willow Tree, or rounding the Liverpool Range on the west, moving north from Mudgee through Dubbo, an entry point. Cunningham's Pandora's Pass was little used. In 1827 there were cattle runs on Liverpool Plains, in 1830 Coonabarabran ran was taken up, and the squatters pushed on north and west. In 1832 the Australian Agricultural Company pre-empted the best land on Liverpool Plains, and drove the squatters on, some to New England, some into the plains. Werris Creek was occupied in 1836, but in that year and 1837 runs were also right out to the north, at Wee Waa and Moree. The eyes were picked out of the country very quickly, and later arrivals filled in the gaps. The Macintyre and Barwon were occupied about 1840, and the whole country was subdivided into large runs by 1848.

The movement north from Dubbo filled in the western area about the same time. In 1824 there was a station at Dubbo, but this was withdrawn as too remote, and a permanent run, Dolhunty's, was claimed there in 1833. The Macquarie river country was taken up in the 1830s. This was sheep country, while to the east and north cattle predominated. On the Dubbo side were the Wellington and Bligh pastoral district. Bligh had 53 stations, 570 people, 23,000 cattle and 146,000
sheep in 1839: given 10 acres per head of cattle and 4 acres for sheep, cattle occupied as much or more of the country, and this was particularly true of the Namoi and Gwydir pastoral districts. There were more cattle runs than sheep stations. The wealthy sheep owners had gone up to New England, which had very few cattle stations. The rough grazing of the plains, and the danger of dingoes, made the plains more suitable for cattle. And cattlemen, rather than sheepmen, disliked and were disturbed more by Aborigines, hence perhaps the ferocity of the struggle. The cattle were driven down to fattening pastures in the Hunter, or even Cumberland; Maitland exported much salt beef. Durhams were the most common breed. So in 1848, Liverpool Plains had 57 runs with sheep and 94 with cattle; the Gwydir had 26 with sheep and 70 with cattle. Cattle have generally been under-emphasised in accounts of the squatting occupation of New South Wales.

Early runs were often owned by absenteeees who lived in the Hunter Valley, Cumberland or the Bathurst area. This and the temporary licence regulations explain the absence of early impressive houses in the squatting districts. Rather, there were ex-convict or convict stockkeepers and shepherds living in huts. A sheep station might employ twenty men, a cattle station between two and four, with co-operation between neighbouring runs at the annual muster. These were huge holdings, up to 200,000 acres. Cattle were therefore cheaper to keep, needing only a few men, a few stockyards, and a grain paddock. Droving meant more men: four men could take 350 cattle to the Hunter, two of them driving drays. Wool was more expensive to transport. The gold era in the 1850s saw a new demand for cattle in Victoria, high prices, and a new long-distance droving route in which Dubbo was the point of departure. Disappointed diggers meant more labour, and sheep steadily replaced cattle after 1860: wool was more profitable with high prices, fencing was coming in to reduce labour costs, and the dingo had 'succumbed to strychnine'. More owners came to live on their stations, and with security of tenure after 1847, better houses were built.

Urban development before 1850 was very limited, due to a sparse and poor population. Petty sessions were held at Tamworth, headquarters of the Australian Agricultural Company and an important droving point for stock coming down from New England. In 1851, Warialda on the Gwydir had a population of 45, and a court of petty sessions. Wee Waa, site of the commissioner's office, had a courthouse and lockup in 1847, and Dubbo had its early beginnings as a commissioner's headquarters and court house. Pockataroo and Canonba were very small villages. What the country did have, and it is very clear from travellers' accounts, is a multitude of isolated inns of which, such as at Narrabri, developed into town sites, but most of which have returned to dust or been burned. These isolated inns were the mainstay of travel and local recreation, and were to be found throughout the colony.

GOLD

On these alluvial plains, gold finds were not to be expected. At Nundle however, and on the Peel river close to the mountains, there was a gold rush, beginning at Swamp Creek in 1851. At first this was a small man's rush, peaking in 1852-6. Diggers went up to the Plateau, where dams were constructed and can still be seen, and down the Peel River, where Bowling Alley Corner was a subsidiary centre. The Company at first sold private licenses to diggers, and then floated the Peel River Land and Mineral Company, with a capital of £600,000, of which most went to the Company for use of its land. It failed miserably, but gave a boost to Tamworth, and the land, a small part of the whole estate, was subdivided for small farms. The Australian Agricultural Company had moved its headquarters to Goonoo Goonoo in the 1840s, but retained the bulk of its land throughout the nineteenth century, a barrier to the small farmer on some of the best wheat-growing land. Gold brought labour for the pastoralists, including many Chinese who were subsequently employed in ringbarking.
THE PERIOD 1861-1900

A major development stemming from pastoralism was the timber growth of the Pilliga Scrub on over 5,000 square miles of country south of Narrabri. This sandy-soiled area was taken up in the 1830s and 1840s in some 30 large runs, often grassy forest with cypress pine on the ridges. The run-holders outwitted selectors and retained their runs - the soil was not good farming country.

By 1870 there had been no burning for decades, and acacia and cypress pine were spreading into the pastures. The pines spread rapidly, reducing or destroying grazing values. This was quite a general problem on the plains of NSW and the government invented special sub-leases at low rents for those who would re-clear the land. The splitting of holdings into homestead and resumed areas under the 1884 Lands Act accentuated the problem. By the 1880s, the Pilliga was a vast forest of pine, with ironbark coming through, and grazing was driven out. When rabbits arrived in 1891, the remaining settlers moved away. What had been grazing country now supported a timber industry and the Pilliga Scrub was dedicated to forestry in 1907 as Pilliga East Block and Pilliga West Block. Timbergetting had begun, however, as early as the 1870s, and sawpits were soon replaced by steam sawmills in the forest, with their associated villages, the settlements being peripatetic as timber was cut out in one area. Barradine became the centre, but Narrabri and Coonabarabran also benefited. Pine was cut for flooring and weatherboards, ironbark for sleepers, fence posts and girders. The mills in the scrub persisted until 1951, when a series of great fires drove them to the margins of the scrub.

The Scrub suitably splits the Plains into subregions. To the southeast is Liverpool Plains. Here the Company had its Peel River Estate of 300,000 acres, with centres at Goonoo Goonoo, its headquarters, Caines Creek and Killala (Tamworth). Urban centres were established as the railway reached through the Plains.

In 1861 Tamworth had a population of 654, both in the government town on the north side of the river, and in the company town on the south side, where an Anglican church was built. Most of the good land was held as grazing land by the Company, and selectors mostly failed on the remaining land. They were inexperienced and usually in debt. Tamworth prospered as a traffic centre. Manilla, a successful selector area to the north, sent its grain south to Tamworth for milling. The railway arrived in 1873, and drew much of the northern wool traffic by dray to Tamworth. A Municipality was created in 1876, when Tamworth had flour mills, a tannery, butter factory, plaster works, brick and pipe-making, brewery, clothing and furniture manufacture. Its services included a hospital, post office and telegraph, court house, police station, two schools, two banks and six insurance brokers. In 1888, Tamworth was the first Australian town to use electric lighting.

Of the other towns in this area, Quirindi was the next to receive the railway in 1877. However, its strength as a wheat centre did not develop until farmers came into the district in the 1890s. Curlewiss was a product of the line to Gunnedah in 1879. In 1885, when a plan was laid out, it was a village with post office and school. Werris Creek was also a railway town on the Tamworth to Quirindi line. It gained added importance when the line to Gunnedah made its junction here. The railway workshops were transferred here from Murrurundi in 1896, and a coal mine was opened to supply the railway. The railway attracted a meat works in 1894, and local selectors created a local trade. The network of lines created by the railway enabled communication between townships that were growing as part of the area's agricultural development.

Running west to Dubbo, squeezed between Liverpool Range and the Pilliga Scrub, is a strip of land much of which was occupied by the Company's Warrah Estate. It was fertile and well watered. Selection was popular here from 1861, particularly after the 1884 Act which broke the squatters' hold on much land. Coonabarabran stands in the headwaters of the Castlereagh river, and provided stores and inns for pastoralists moving in from the Mudgee district. By 1858 there was a police station, and in 1860 the first
town land was sold, and a courthouse built. Selection encouraged settlement, and by the 1870s there were a post office, stores, inns, school, flour mills and newspaper.

Gulgandra and Gulargambone also came into being as a result of free selection.

The Dubbo district lies in the west. Early pastoralism was enhanced by a more varied land use and larger population with free selection from 1861. Small-scale mixed farming, using wheat, sheep and orchards, occupied the banks of the Macquarie and Talbragar rivers and numerous creeks. Small farming increased after the 1884 Act, and with resumption after 1894. By the end of the century, the era of big pastoral stations was over on the middle Macquarie and Castlereagh rivers, but persisted further out in the Warren and Nyngan areas. Dubbo had been planned in 1849, when it already had a courthouse, inn and school. It benefited as the major crossing place on the droving route from the north going into Victoria, and a bridge was built in 1857, when it also had saleyards. When freezing became possible, an abattoir was built in the 1880s.

Dubbo was a prosperous town, and brick buildings were common from the 1870s. The town became a municipality in 1871, though the town hall dates from 1883, and the railway brought a gasworks in 1881. The town boomed in the prosperous years of the 1880s, and much of its architecture is of this period. Dubbo acquired increased importance when the line to Bourke was built very fast to draw the river traffic down into New South Wales and away from South Australia.

Not all towns were completely dependent upon the railway. The new railway bypassed Warren, an established centre for marketing cattle from the north, and a new town, Nevertire, was laid out on the line of railway. Warren lost its place on the coach route from Dubbo to Bourke. Up to this time it had thrived, with a post office in 1863, and also stores, inns, blacksmithy, bootmaker, saddler, and butcher. Indeed, the Town and Country Journal described it in 1875 as 'the emporium of the lower Macquarie', with doctors, chemists and a bank. Its population in 1881 was 427. All this was threatened by the bypassing of the railway: Warren fought back, lowering its prices and charges, and demanding a link line which it obtained in 1898. Nevertire languished, a mere halting place in the plains. Warren meanwhile grew to 1,006 people in 1901. The town overcame the indifference of the Railway Commissioners.

Warren's assertiveness was not repeated further north. Canonbar [Canobal] had been one of the earliest villages, but collapsed when bypassed by the railway in 1883; the people and businesses moving to the new town of Nyngan on the railway line. Until then, Nyngan had merely been a water reserve, and was chosen as a railway stopping place for that reason. By 1891 it was a municipality [see Table 2], a town hall was built in 1897, after a reticulated water supply had been laid on in 1898. In a few years the rail traffic it had came to equal the earlier town of Coonamble which had become a municipality in 1880.

On the northern side of the Pilliga scrub the large plains stations were not troubled by selectors, though many took up their pre-emptive and auction rights to secure their head stations and water supplies. The 1884 Act began the reduction of the huge stations, but the real effect began with the resumptions policy that followed 1895, when small leases of 10,000 acres began to replace stations of several hundred thousand acres. The process of subdivision into the wheat-sheep farms of the present day had begun.

The early pastoral centre had been Warialda, home of the Commissioner for Crown Lands. A courthouse and lockup served the district from Warialda in 1850. A demand for a more central location led to an additional court at Moree in 1862, although a courthouse was built only in 1874 [replaced in 1901]. The town of Moree was laid out in 1860, and soon eclipsed Warialda - in 1861 it had two inns, two stores, a post office and a pound, and a population of 43. By 1871 its population had reached 107, with three hotels, a butcher and a saddler, and a school. These towns of the Darling Plains were the places of which Henry Lawson wrote. Major growth came in the
1880s, with more settlement and a fine Land Office to distribute it, a newspaper and three churches. Moree became a municipality in 1891. A list of its activities in 1902 may indicate the role of a plain’s town of the time:

3 physicians, 2 dentists, 2 chemists, 4 solicitors, surveyor, photographer, jeweller, hairdresser, 4 stock and station agents, 7 tobacconists, undertaker, 2 bootmakers, plumber, 4 saddlers, 8 stores, 2 newspapers, 4 wool scourers, engineering, coachbuilder, brewery, sawmilling, brickworks, private hospital, public hospital (built 1898).

Moree was the centre of an extension of the artesian basin, which has maintained a pastoral water supply in the region since the first bore was sunk at Moree in 1895. The margin of the artesian water has retreated westward due to depletion, and many wells are now capped to save water, or reduced to pumping. There are now about 250 artesian wells in the district. Moree’s water is hot, and sustained the wool-scouring industry until marketing wool in the grease became more usual, and is now being exploited as a tourist attraction.

Warialda meanwhile grew as a lesser town, but far enough from Moree to maintain a separate existence supported by subdivision of holdings. A hospital was built in 1862, a post office in 1880, and a new court house in 1882. Its main growth is due to twentieth-century increases in rural farms, and it does not contain the fine nineteenth-century buildings found in Moree, capital of the district.

The plains of the Namoi are served by Narrabri on the northern edge of the Pilliga Scrub, so that sawmilling has been important. Wee Waa was the earlier pastoral foundation, but a larger town grew on a water reserve made in 1880 on Narrabri Creek, an offshoot of the Namoi that provided a major water supply. Narrabri was on the droving route south, an important crossing place. By 1871 the population was 350, with stores, inns, a bank and a school. Settlement was stimulated when the railway reached it in 1882. The town became a municipality in the next year. In that year a courthouse was built. As in Moree, the town shows ample evidence of the boom-style architecture of the 1880s. The town hall built in 1893 is now demolished, but the oval’s grandstand of 1900 still stands. The town is unusual in that it was given a large common in 1867: this was subdivided in 1967. At first the railway came to a station well west of the town, and the separate centre of Narrabri West sprang up at the railway. Narrabri West was added to Narrabri municipality in 1957, and the whole absorbed into Narrabri Shire in 1980.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
This century has seen the destruction of the great pastoral holdings on the plains, and their replacement by large sheep stations in the west and north, and the spread of the wheat-sheep farm over most of the centre and east. Subdivision has come about in a number of ways. First, government has continued to resume land for subdivision, strengthening the 1895 Act with the Act of 1900. Under this for example, another 100,000 acres of the Peel River estate bordering Tamworth were transformed into small farms. Around Dubbo in the west the same process took place. Then the soldier settlement led to more small farms. Meanwhile, taxation and the rising value of land, aided by inheritance, has led to much private subdivision. This is particularly so as wheat has become a major profitable crop, quite unsuitable for the vast stations.

The early subdivisions however were made at a time when a small farmer might manage say 200 acres: there has been a corresponding process of amalgamation in the old selection and early subdivision areas, and even rural depopulation. Mechanisation has meant that wheat-sheep farms are several thousand acres, while the sheep holdings are 9-20,000 acres. The decisive shifts were the discovery of wheats which could withstand northern summers, culminating in 1946 with northern premium hard wheats which fetch high prices and allowed Moree to become the centre of a vast wheat-growing region, and the evolution of the wheat-sheep farm in the 1920s. Now half of Australian sheep is held on this type of holding. In safer country to the southeast, fat lambs are marketed, but wool is the chief
livestock product over most of the plains. The whole area has become a prosperous farming district at a medium density of rural population.

Meanwhile crop diversification has been the recent development, into sorghum, oilseeds, sudax, soybeans and cotton. The latter in particular, along the Nami and Gwydir rivers, has benefited from large irrigation schemes drawing on the Copeton, Keepit and Split Rock dams on the western flank of New England. Wee Waa with its cotton gins, Narrabri and Moree with their oil-crushing industries, have most benefited as towns from this recent development. The larger towns have also drawn custom away from the smaller towns with the aid of motor transport. More than ever, Moree, Narrabri, Tamworth and Dubbo dominate the region, leaving heritage opportunities in many smaller centres such as Nundle and Warialda.

Tamworth has grown into the main centre, drawing both on New England and the Darling Plains custom for its specialist services, such as wholesaling and medical specialisation. In 1911 a major new power station was built; another in 1931, and one of the last country power stations in 1956. These three stood side by side until recently when they were demolished and replaced by a motel. During the Great Depression unemployed workers were used to beautify Oxley Park and build a flood mitigation scheme. A radio station worked from 1935. As a major inland town, the population doubled from 12,071 in 1943 to 24,500 in 1971, and the Dungowan dam on the Peel river was needed to maintain a water supply. Tamworth is particularly rich in residential buildings from the late nineteenth century, though as a modern, growing town, its old centre has largely been replaced. Werris Creek has lost its functions as a railway workshop town, and with the transformation of the railway locomotives to diesel its mine also closed. It survives as a rural service centre, as does Coonabarabran, which enjoys tourist patronage from the nearby Warrumbungle national park.

The Mount Kaputar national park draws tourists to Narrabri, which retains much more of its main-street nineteenth-century landscape than Tamworth, though it too has grown, with 16,000 people in 1986. Moree is in a similar state.

The kind of community development that has occurred is indicated in the table following which shows the involvement of institutions to Nyngan, a virtually new railway town of 1883. It can be seen that Nyngan had acquired most of the necessary institutions of a nineteenth-century town by 1901, including a hospital. Tennis and cycling were early twentieth century ‘rages’ represented in the town, and a Red Cross Society was prompted by the war in 1914. The interwar period of Depression saw the population remain static, but characteristic additions were made to services, including a power station, fire brigade and a golf club. Post Second World War saw the population rise considerably, partly due to prosperous rural surroundings, but mainly due to an influx of employees of government services who are the mainstays of country town populations today. This has been a period in which Nyngan has been drawn into the business network with Rotary, Lions and Apex clubs being established. Education has become more modern with a clear distinction between primary and high schools. And prosperity has been sufficient to fund an Olympic pool. Spread of air services has given Nyngan an alternative to the railway, and train passenger services have been withdrawn. This table indicates the growth and diversification of a small country town, which is not atypical, and which enriches and diversifies country life.

The foundation of the Country Women’s Association in 1923 makes Nyngan one of the early branches of this organisation, now represented in most country towns though run from a Sydney headquarters.

The Darling Plains region exhibits classically the main processes that have shaped the cultural landscape. The building of a community, as represented in the following table, could be represented by well chosen examples. This apparently endless plain has been turned to use by a sophisticated community, despite its howling droughts and destructive floods.
## Growth of Social Facilities in a Country Town — Nyngan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>Inn</td>
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<td>Stopping place for Cobb and Co</td>
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<td>Police Station</td>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>Railway</td>
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CONCLUSION
The Darling Plains can at times seem rich and hospitable, at other times drought-prone and harsh. The early squatters found cattle the best stock for coarse grasses, and only as the fodder changed and wool prices increased did it become a major wool-producing area. Wheat growing, hampered by high summer rainfalls, entered the region only slowly, first on the eastern boundary with New England, but spreading with new breeds to encompass virtually the whole area, now dominantly in wheat-sheep farms with the break-up of the vast pastoral stations. While Tamworth and Dubbo had a gateway role for entry to the region, other sub-regional centres have sprung up, notably Coonabarabran, Narrabri and Moree. Smaller towns have been created by the railways. Central to the region is the Pilliga Scrub, a man-made forest which Eric Rolls has brilliantly described in *A Million Wild Acres*. 
8. Central Tableland

The region is a flat plain elevated by uplift and containing parts of the central tablelands and central slopes. It represents an area of early occupation, mostly within the limits of location of 1829. It consists of a number of level tablelands separated by ranges dropping generally in altitude towards the west. Except in the west, there are good topographical boundaries, though the regional boundary follows the local government areas.

Rugged land exists in the Canobolas area, along the Abercrombie and Turon Rivers, both goldfields, and in the east. Part of the area drains to the east through the Coxs River, but most to the west by way of the Macquarie and Upper Lachlan Rivers.

The western boundary separates the slopes from the inland plains. On the east lie the Blue Mountains, the Jenolan Uplands and the Rylstone Upland. For the rest, it is mostly undulating or level country.

Originally this was timbered land, with dense forests on the upland and open forest country on the rolling and level plains. Box associations are most common, with Sheoak and Manna gum along the rivers.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

CITIES
Bathurst, Greater Lithgow,
Orange,

SHIRES
Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Evans,
Mudgee, Oberon, Rylstone,
Wellington
ABORIGINAL PEOPLE
European settlement in these southeastern parts of the region was tentative because of apprehensions about resistance from the Aboriginal people. Members of the Wiradjuri linguistic group had occupied on a seasonal basis most of the Macquarie River area. They moved regularly in small groups but preferred the open land and used the waterways for a variety of food. There are numerous river flats where debris from recurrent camps accumulated over a long period. Naturally the focus of settler attention was on many of the areas most favoured by the indigenous people. There was some contact, witnessed by sporadic hostility and by the quantity of surviving artefacts manufactured by the Aborigines from European glass.

The apprehensions of early settlers, whether justified or not, were real enough. They are demonstrated in 1831 by Captain Steel withdrawing his family from the exposed farm at Rockley to Perthville close to Bathurst. But even around Bathurst apprehensions persisted; in the mid 1830s Major-General Stewart erected a battlemented defensive screen on his brick house at Mount Pleasant (now Strath) on the Ophir Road northwest of Bathurst.

By 1840 apprehensions about dangers from the Aboriginal inhabitants had abated and there was widespread dislocation of Aboriginal culture. Blankets and other government supplies were still being handed out to Aborigines at Mudgee in the 1840s. Corroborees were still held on the hills around Mudgee in the 1850s. But these were the last signs of an independent Aboriginal presence. The destruction caused through resistance, was aggravated by disease, alcohol and the gold rush.

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT
In 1813 George Evans crossed the Blue Mountains, looked upon the Central Tableland and found it good: 'I am more pleased with the Country every day. It is a great extent of Grazing land without being divided by barren spaces as on the East side of the Mountains, and well watered by running streams in almost every Valley'. Though timbered, the rolling plains around the Macquarie River were open, with long visibility and an encouraging quality of grass. The new colony's need for new expansive grazing land was the prime mover in the early colonisation of the tableland and the establishment of the early towns. The initial settlement was controlled by Governor Macquarie in two ways. One was the reservation of the land west of the Macquarie River for government stock and government agricultural stations, with convict workers and military overseers: the other control was the limited use of land-grants and grazing permits to individual colonists.

Under Macquarie and Brisbane, private occupation was restricted to the east bank of the Macquarie and Campbell rivers: Bathurst, on the further bank, was a government station from 1815 onwards, while Kelso, on the east bank, was developed from 1818 onwards by small settlers. In 1823, Wellington Valley, 190 kilometres to the west, was created as a new, remote convict stock station 'far removed from the undue interference of settlers and all the comforts of civilised existence', as Governor Brisbane said.

The basic purpose of opening up this large area was to breed cattle. The letters of John Maxwell, the superintendent of government stock from 1823 to 1831, give a vivid glimpse of the day to day handling of bulls, cows and working oxen. Horses and some sheep were necessary and the need for some self-sufficiency created paddocks of wheat and maize, with a small tobacco industry at Wellington.

Because of the distance separating Wellington from Bathurst, an intermediate station was established in the mid 1820s on Fredericks Valley Creek, near the later town of Orange, but the character of the region was about to change rapidly. The entire region was opened to private settlement when Governor Darling redefined the limits of location in 1826. The eastern sector of the region along the Fish River and the eastern bank of the Macquarie was settled by sheep farmers by 1820. The area to the west had been largely cattle country and Wellington remained so into the 1830s, but the opening up of the area west of Bathurst had by 1838 produced a 4:1 ratio of sheep over cattle in the region as a whole.
In the 1820s and 1830s more and more convicts completed their sentences and sought land: simultaneously free migrants, qualifying for larger land-grants, moved west. The shape of pastoral development on the tableland was fundamentally changed by the new settlers and their flocks along Campbells River to the south, where Thomas Arkell, a superintendent of government stock, built up an estate of 10,000 acres by 1839 and the Pyes built the fine soapstone homestead of Bunnamagoo in 1831. Captain Steel opened up Rockley after 1829 and Burrage was initially exploited by the Redmonds, Behans and Browns.

**HOMESTEADS AND EARLY TOWNSHIPS**

As the Aboriginal way of life vanished the large pastoral properties around Mudgee were developed. The Lawsons at Putta Bucca, Coxes at Munna and Burrundulla, the Lowes at Wilbertree, the Rouses at Biranganbil and Guntawang, one of the Suttorrs of Brucedale at Bunnamagoo all established significant runs with significant homesteads. The areas in the northeast, later known as Rylstone and Wollar, were grazed by the flocks and herds of a prominent emancipist, Richard Fitzgerald, while further south Bowenfels and Lithgow Valley became a Scottish enclave of Andrew Brown, Thomas Brown and the Rev Colin Stewart. Fellow Scots, the Walkers, opened up the Lue area in the northeast while both the Walkers and Andrew Brown of Coorowill began in the 1830s the link between the Central Tableland and that part of the Darling plain to the north that was watered by the Castlereagh [Region 7]. The extension of pastoral interests beyond the limits of location meant that by the 1840s the Central Tableland was no longer primarily a frontier area looking back to the Blue Mountains and the coast, but also a major entrepot for the plains to the north: Andrew Brown each year drove his flocks from the Castlereagh to Bowenfels for shearing in the stone shed at Coorowill.

More intensive European exploitation of the region created a need for villages and market centres. The surveyors laid out the plans for many projected villages throughout the areas in the 1830s and 1840s. Despite the usual false starts, when sites proved unattractive for urban development, the familiar towns of the area mostly had their physical origins before 1850: Bathurst in 1833, Mudgee in 1837, Carcoar in 1838, Rylstone in 1842, Orange and Wellington in 1846.

**GOLD**

The impact of the 1850s was more dramatic on the Central Tableland than anywhere else in New South Wales. Ophir, Lewis Ponds Creek, Sofala, Hill End, Wattle Flat, Trunkey, the names to conjure with in early gold rush history, all lie within this region (either in Cabonne or in Evans shire). The effect of the gold rush on other regions was one of dislocation as people hurried off to the goldfields. On the Central Tableland this dislocation was also evident — Rockley, for example, was gazetted as a township in 1851, but did not fulfill the balanced commercial development of a country town. But uniquely on the Tableland, the massive influx of transient miners, their followers and the new requirements of new towns beside the mines created an exciting and tumultuous period of resettlement which has been the focus of national interest.

The cosmopolitan population at the new town of Sofala in 1851-2 and the frantic activity first in alluvial and then over the following decades in shaft-mining for gold ended the pastoral backwater of the Suttorrs and the Richards family. In the 1870s the exponential growth area moved to Hill End-Tambaroora. Hill End township had 28 hotels and five banks by 1872 and a population of 8,508, twice as many as the old-established Bathurst. Throughout the 1870s Hill End dominated the eastern section of the goldfields but the yield from the mines above Sofala and on the dry gully country around Wattle Flat remained high and eclipsed Hill End from the 1890s until the First World War.

The southern end of the goldfield, around the Abercrombie River near Trunkey, had a less dramatic history, with alluvial mining in the 1850s and a slow capitalisation of serious reef-mining. Trunkey rose to prominence slightly before Hill End. Its first major reef was exploited in 1868 and off and on over the 1870s, late 1880s and late 1890s there was a great deal of activity and investment in the Trunkey and Copperhannia...
field. Unlike Hill End, Trunkey township did not blossom into a major conurbation but retained more stability than Hill End: it remained, and still remains, much as it was in 1872 before the major activity but after the initial euphoria.

The impact of gold seeking on the southern sector of the region was partially matched by the discoveries around Mudgee in the north. The Hargraves reef, with alluvial pickings in Merroo and Louisa creeks, was discovered, like the Turon area, in 1851 and reef-mining with overseas capital began on a large scale earlier than at Sofala and Tambaroora. The township of Hargraves was declared in the 1860 as the administrative centre of the Merroo Creek mining field but had already existed in the 1850s with substantial houses, a police station and a National School. The area to the south, around Pyramul Creek, was also explored successfully for gold in the 1850s and creeks such as Campbells, Long and Clarkes brought many European and Chinese miners to the new settlement of Windeyer. All this was overshadowed in the 1870s by the spectacular growth of Gulgong. In the single year 1872 the mines around Gulgong produced twice as much gold as the Merroo field produced in half a century. After 1877, however, Gulgong declined and, although producing gold for another twenty years, was much less significant than the Turon mines at Hill End, Sofala and Wattle Flat in that period. The Merroo field also displayed more staying power, with Chinese and European fossickers picking over the claims in the ten years up to 1888, followed by substantial reef mining. The best years for shaft-mining at Hargraves were the decade 1894 to 1903 and at Windeyer the twenty years between 1894 and the First World War.

The area around Orange also saw recurrent gold-fever. The geology of Summer Hill Creek, near the government stock-station of Fredericks Valley in the 1820s, produced a distinctive gold in company with antimony. As elsewhere, alluvial mining was soon followed by the sinking of shafts and, as elsewhere, the fortunes of Lucknow rose and fell. The landowners, W.C. Wentworth (an absentee) and Andrew Kerr of Wellwood (a resident) encouraged the early phase in 1851, but the real gold-rush came to Lucknow only in the six years 1862 to 1867, when the land was sold and many speculative mining companies sank shafts. The principal character of this period, W.H. Newman, again reached prominence with new deeper workings twenty years later, from 1882 to 1888. New investors and new technology reactivated the Lucknow field in the decade after the 1889 slump but the prosperity of the mines and the township of Lucknow never returned after 1900.

There were thus five major areas of gold-mining within the region, operating with varying success from 1851 until the First World War and beyond: the Turon/Macquarie area (Sofala, Wattle Flat, Hill End, Tambaroora, Chambers Creek); the Merroo/Pyramul fields (Hargraves and Windeyer); Gulgong; Lucknow; and Trunkey. The relative significance of the gold-producing areas is shown in the following table covering the period from 1850 to 1920 decade by decade.

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Turon was the most successful in the 1850s and 1870s, the Merroo/Pyramul field in the 1850s and 1880s. Gulgong burst on the scene in the 1870s. Lucknow appeared in the 1860s and again in the 1880s, while Trunkey had mixed fortunes with investors best rewarded in the 1870s and 1890s.

Such mineral wealth over so long a period might have prompted the growth of major towns, but in fact had very variable results. The mushroom growth of Hill End did not endure (though the town retained a borough council from 1873 until 1908 and was thereafter the administrative headquarters of Turon Shire council until 1977). Trunkey never became a major centre at all. The moderate growth of Gulgong did not produce a town of importance but discouraged the development of Mudgee in the nineteenth
century: Mudgee was just too far away from the goldfields. Only Orange, very close indeed to Lucknow, benefited permanently from the gold of the tableland: the banks of Orange received half a million dollars from the Lucknow miners in the mid-1860s.

THE RAILWAY AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In the middle of the mining period the railway reached the Central Tableland. There was the customary politicking among the townships over the preferred route westwards from the Lithgow ZigZag in the 1870s and 1880s. The result was the extension of the main line west to Bathurst in 1876, to Blayney later in the same year, to Orange in 1877 and to Wellington two months later. Molong failed in its efforts to be on the Orange to Wellington line and relapsed into torpor.

A rail-link north from Lithgow to the Mudgee area was not achieved until the 1880s. The new track from Wallerawang reached Rylstone in June 1884 and Mudgee three months later. Mudgee, which had not greatly profited from the adjacent goldfields, had mixed results from the new railway: as elsewhere the convenient transport to and from the coast gave useful new markets for local agricultural produce, but also encouraged the import of manufactured goods from Sydney at competitive prices which helped Mudgee purchasers but gave stiff competition for Mudgee manufacturers. The railway did not get beyond Mudgee for a quarter of a century, reaching Gulgong in 1909 and Dunedoo in 1910.

The southwest of the region was served by a branch line from Blayney (on the main western railway) to the main south line at Doddrill Junction that was opened in 1888. This line ran through Carcoar, Mandurama, Woodstock and Cowra. It is interesting to compare the effects on Carcoar and Cowra. Cowra benefited greatly, gained municipal status in the same year, 1888, and shook itself free of Blayney. Carcoar, much closer to Blayney, suffered the reverse: Carcoar had been laid out in 1838-9 as a rural centre not only for the Icely estate but for a wider area of the Belubula and Lachlan valleys. By 1850, just before the gold rush, Carcoar had 500 inhabitants, and was second only to Bathurst in size: there was a thrice-weekly coach service between the two towns. Although there was a little gold in Carcoar the gold-rush by-passed the town which stopped its growth in the 1860s. The period from 1876 [when the railway reached Blayney] to 1888 [when the line was finally extended to Carcoar] was one of further isolation: the entrepreneurial developments that made Blayney by 1888 ‘destined to figure among the larger towns of the central country’ [as the Aldine Centenary History claimed] largely passed Carcoar by. After 1866, when 600 people lived in Carcoar, the population slowly declined and plummeted from 535 in 1911, to 263 in 1921. The result has been a well-preserved small Tableland township in a scenic part of the Belubula River, in sharp contrast to the continuing, unsympathetic development of Blayney with almost four times the population.

On the main western railway line Orange and Dubbo [beyond the Central Tableland region] were the principal growth areas. Wellington succeeded in having the large railway running sheds erected there rather than at Dubbo, but it failed to gain a high school under the Public Instruction Act of 1880: the two country high schools opened in 1883 were located at Bathurst and Goulburn. The town developed but with deliberate speed. A visitor described it in 1896: ‘Wellington has the name of being the slowest town in the Western district. The town is built in a straggling fashion, and the public buildings are here, there and everywhere. No one seems to be in a hurry in Wellington, and the streets are always quiet, yet a steady trade seems to be done by the business people of the town and there is no sign of poverty or privation. There is a lack of enterprise, in short stagnation is the term most appropriate to the life of the district’.

Stagnation was not the impression given by Orange, in the heart of the tableland. From slow beginnings in the 1840s on a sloping site without a reliable watercourse, Orange had become a focus for a farming hinterland in the 1850s and a banking centre for Lucknow gold in the 1860s. It had been incorporated in 1860, although still a fairly marginal case, with only one fifth of the population of Mudgee. By 1864 it was half the size of Mudgee. By 1866 the wheat industry had stimulated the building of three flour mills; ten new hotels joined the four of 1860. Orcharding
pears, apples, cherries and plums in the Pinnacle area, still a major cash-crop, developed steadily and by 1871 Orange had some 1,500 inhabitants. After the railway came in 1877, however, Orange enlarged rapidly, with a particularly grandiose business area in Summer Street. The strong, prosperous Irish Catholic community in Orange played an exceptional role in civic and business life led by James Dalton, the storekeeper, who in 1876, in expectation of the railway, built his country house of Duntryleague next to the town, the most splendid house of any Irishman in colonial Australia, equalled only in 1902 by Kangarooie in Cabonne shire built by James Dalton’s son Michael.

Although suffering from a very inadequate water supply until after 1890, Orange blossomed with fine public, ecclesiastical and private buildings in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The opening of the Crown Lands office, confirmed the premier position of Orange in the Central Tableland in 1885. The prosperity of the fruit industry helped to cushion it against the collapse of the Lucknow goldfield in the late 1880s and the general bank crisis of 1893. Population grew steadily from 2,700 in 1881, to 5,000 in 1891, and 6,300 in 1901 (including East Orange in the figures).

INDUSTRY AND MINING (OTHER THAN GOLD)
The railway was a useful catalyst in allowing Bathurst, Orange, Blayney, Wellington and Mudgee to fulfil some measure of their different potentials. At Lithgow it transformed, almost instantly, a pastoral backwater into one of the major industrial towns of New South Wales. Because heavy freight could be easily transported by rail the value of Lithgow’s coal reserves could for the first time be realised. Both to fuel the steam-trains from 1869 onwards and to power secondary industry within Lithgow Valley, the Western Coalfield was feverishly exploited. The coal supply prompted James Rutherford to open rolling-mills to recycle scrap iron into rails for the extending western line. Because of the availability of iron ore and limestone, Rutherford also built a short-lived blast furnace to smelt native iron. Lithgow developed three smelters for copper ore: the central tableland has the longest history of copper mining in New South Wales. There were a great many discoveries of copper ore from the 1840s onwards. The principal exploitation took place in the following sequence, much of it lasting intermittently into the twentieth century. The Copper Hill mine at Molong was the earliest metalliferous mine opened commercially in New South Wales and the consequent interest in copper is part of the Copper Rush that transformed South Australia in the 1840s.

1845 Copper Hill (south of Molong)
1847 Summerhill (Rockley)
1849 Byng (or Cornish Town)
1850 Carcoar
1862 Cadia
1870 Cow Flat
1873 Milburn Creek (Cowra)
Wisemans Creek (Brewongle)
1874 Apsley
1876 Sunny Corner
1877 Burraga
1881 Blayney
1895 Larrys Hill or Phoenix (north of Oberon)
1898 Tuglow (south of Oberon)

These copper mines have almost all left archaeological remains, including some on-site processing plant, out of proportion to their economic success. Cadia’s beam-engine house and associated remains have recently been assessed as of national significance because of ‘the high level of integrity of the surviving structural elements, and the physical evidence of the mine layout, combined with the presence of unique components of the engine and crushing machinery’. There is nothing quite comparable on the other sites, but the pine plantations which today replace the devastated native forest that fed Burraga’s reverberatory furnaces a century ago make a contrast to the barren, poisoned hillside at Sunny Corner, still today almost sterile from the smelting of complex silver ores containing both lead and arsenic. Sunny Corner and Dark Corner together produced gold, silver, zinc, antimony and copper: there was a minor gold rush
in the decade following 1865, copper mining from 1876, silver-smelting from 1883 and after lean years from 1896 to 1916, zinc was mined along with silver from 1917 onwards.

The other major extractive industry of the tableland was oil-shale. The deposits at Hartley Vale, Torbane and Airly, Newnes and Glen Davis (together with Mount Kembla in Illawarra and Joadja in Wingecarribee shire in the Sydney region) dominated nineteenth- and early twentieth-century shale-oil extraction in Australia. Hartley Vale led the way in 1865. Airly and Torbane, in the Colo wilderness area west of Capertee, flourished as a mining community from 1883 but declined after 1908 and died by 1918. Newnes in the remote Wolgan Valley opened in 1906 and continued until 1922. In an attempt to counter war-time oil shortages its refining equipment was moved to Glen Davis in 1939. The Glen Davis venture, though never an economic success, closed only in 1952.

**CONCLUSION**

Since the 1920s there has been a massive decline in mining and associated industry on the tableland. Lithgow benefited from the first Australian steelworks, opened in 1900, and from the first modern blast furnace for iron ore built by William Sandford in 1906-7. The ironworks at Lithgow was operated by the Hoskins family, from 1908 until the transfer of the blast furnaces and the rolling plant to Port Kembla after 1928.

World War I had assisted Lithgow's woollen industry by the grant of the khaki contract to the mill which the grazier Andrew Brown had founded in 1867 and the creation of the Small Arms Factory has supplied lasting employment in the town. But the coal mines have closed one by one, all the heavy industry in Lithgow has gone and the present success of the town owes much to the two electric generating stations (Wallerawang and Mount Piper) and their new open-cut coal mines. The woolen industry closed in Lithgow in 1973, although Macquarie Worsted, which had its mill in Orange since 1925, moved their headquarters to Orange in the post-war period, so the region as a whole retains a significant woollen industry. Kaolin extraction remains an important specialist business at Home Rule cement at Kandos and Portland. Orange expanded as an industrial centre in the 1940s and 1950s with Email opening a large refrigerator factory; Lithgow had pioneered refrigeration with T.S. Mort's plant in Oakey Park in 1873 but, as an old Lithgow man complained in 1942, 'Lithgow's a place where things start off all right and then just fizzle out'.

There has been a lot of fizzling out on the central tableland: most of the brickworks, potteries, flour mills, ironworking and mining for coal, gold, silver, lead, zinc, molybdenum (at Mount Tennyson), diamonds (on the Cudgegong), shale oil and copper have disappeared, leaving material heritage of great complexity, importance and, sometimes, splendour. The towns founded primarily, to service mining communities are all ghost towns or small hamlets: Trunkey, Hill End, Sofala, Glen Davis, Newnes, Airly, Hartley Vale, Home Rule, Windeyer, Hargraves, Lucknow, Byng, Mount David, Burraga. Tourism, dependent partly on the heritage of mining, has enabled Carcoar, Gulgong and Millthorpe to survive and has breathed school-exursion life into Hill End and Sofala. Wellington's limestone caves have a modest tourist success, but it is the primary growth-centre towns of Bathurst and particularly Orange which through better facilities, good secondary and tertiary educational institutions, airports and government decentralisation have expanded in recent years.
9. Lachlan

This comprises the main area of the Lachlan River basin above Euabalong, flat, with a slight fall to the west with occasional hills composed of granite intrusions. Lake Cowal and Lake Cargelligo are eastern expressions of the lakes found in Western New South Wales. This is therefore a transitional area to the semi-arid plains of Western New South Wales. The northern boundary comprises the watersheds of the Lachlan and Bogan Rivers. The eastern boundary follows the area of more reliable rainfall and older settlement; this has been a marginal area during the twentieth century. The Lachlan River here takes on a typical semi-arid form, meandering sluggishly. The rainfall is light to very light.

The vegetation is an inland forest of hardwoods, including pine, ironbark, grey, red and yellow box, with river gum along water courses; fodder shrubs such as belah are also present.

Land use: grazing, large scale wheat and oats. The western part of the area is marginal for wheat. Lucerne along alluvial flats.

Mining was important in the past at West Wyalong, Parkes and Forbes, Grenfell and Peak Hill.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

SHIRES
Bland, Forbes, Lachlan, Parkes, Weddin
ABORIGINAL PEOPLE
The Lachlan is part of Wiradjuri country. These ‘people of the three rivers’ occupied all the land from south of the Murrumbidgee to north of the Lachlan as far as the upper reaches of the Macquarie. The Wiradjuri language united a large number of smaller groups and distinguished them from their neighbours on the western plain (the Barkindji) or north of the Macquarie (the Kamilaroi).

The three rivers gave plentiful and consistent food supplies, supplemented by hunting kangaroos and emus and gathering fruit, tubers and nuts on the plains. The majority of meeting-places and sites of special significance lie along the rivers. On the central plain there is a series on either side of the Lachlan and two more sites of significance on the headwaters of the Bogan. There is a high concentration of surviving carved tree sites in Wiradjuri country, principally between the Macquarie and the Bogan, on the Darling plain and the central tableland, but a dozen burial trees are known along the Lachlan or on the adjacent plains, along with some twenty other carved trees.64

Aborigines remained very numerous on the Lachlan plains for decades after white settlement. Sarah Musgrave in extreme old age recollected how about 1840 'a thousand Aborigines came to the station [of Burragong just south of this region] and pitched their camp close to the homestead'65 and both in the Young area and in the Bland the young Sarah took for granted a great deal of contact with the Wiradjuri, both in employment on the stations and while living a more mobile existence. Corroborees continued for an indeterminate time, but, as all available land was occupied by European stock and European crops, traditional ways became impossible. Unlike some areas, however, the Wiradjuri retained a strong sense of relationship to their rivers and their plains, but, as elsewhere, found it increasingly difficult to live outside the new European towns. On the Lachlan plain the principal Wiradjuri communities are to be found at Lake Cargelligo, Condobolin, Peak Hill and, in smaller numbers, at West Wyalong, Forbes and Parkes. A very high degree of marriage within the Wiradjuri community to the exclusion of other Aboriginal groups has helped to preserve this sense of identity and the Wiradjuri Aboriginal Land Council and Cultural Resource Centre, established in 1982-3, are now vital focal points for the original people of the Lachlan plain.66

EUROPEAN DISCOVERY AND SETTLEMENT
The central plain is dominated by the Lachlan River. This critically important waterway winds westwards through the heart of the plain, from Forbes to Condobolin, turning southwards to form part of the western border of the region. Beyond Lake Cargelligo the Lachlan turns south-west to join the Murrumbidgee eventually west of Hay in the western plains region. The northern boundary of Parkes and Lachlan shires is essentially the watershed of the Lachlan and Bogan tributary system. The grazing potential of the Lachlan plain attracted attention long before the area was opened up officially for settlement in the 1840s.

The Lachlan River had been discovered and named as early as 1815, but the discoverer, Surveyor Evans, had not gone further west than Eungowra, which is right on the eastern border of the heritage region. When Oxley explored part of the Lachlan plain in 1817 he made a large circuit from Forbes and Bogan Gate south-west to Griffith, then north to discover Lake Cargelligo (which he named Regent's Lake) and then along the Lachlan to Kiacatoo, which is forty kilometres west of Condobolin. Going north from the river he passed close to Peak Hill and on to Wellington.

In the eighteen years between Oxley's exploration and Thomas Mitchell's, pastoralists brought their cattle onto the plains. The first white child born in the Forbes area was Mary Anne Higgins on Nanima station in 1823. The Grenfell area to the east was still in 1833 occupied solely by Aboriginal people, but in 1834 the Woods, father and son, arrived and, after establishing good relations with the Wiradjuri, established Brundah station [for the father] and Moonbucca [for the son]. When the run of land was added, the Wood family was occupying more than 68,000 hectares of south-east plain before 1840.

The area, known originally as The Levels, an apt description of this south-west area, was pioneered by a very determined widow, Harriet Regan. Joined
later by her three sons, she came west from the Goulburn area in 1835. She was not quite the first settler, for Mr Glass had come to The Levels a year earlier, but she was the matriarch of a dynasty of Lachlan notables. It was Harriet Regan who gave the name The Bland to her property, after her flamboyant Sydney physician, Dr William Bland, and subsequently the whole district east of Wyalong became known as the Bland.

Harriet’s son John Regan was a vigorous explorer, who more than anyone in the 1850s became familiar with the western part of the central plain. Like his mother, he had a flair for the unexpected place-name; in 1858 in a fit of exasperation at losing his way back to camp near the site of Ungarie, he called the creek a ‘humbug’, so that to this day Ungarie lies Astride the Humbug, which is the incrustable title of its local history.

PASTORALISM
Between 1835 and 1858, however, a number of other settlers had opened up large pastoral runs in many parts of the region. In the Bland itself, to the south-west, the runs of Back Creek, Morangorell, Narraburra and Crazumbee were all stocked with cattle in 1836; Abel Bourke in 1838 and Moses Beard in 1840 occupied opposing sides of Bland Creek; Euroka and its neighbour The Yellow Water Holes (owned for more than a century by the Nolans) started in 1838-9; and in the south Barmedman, owned by John Cartwright, had a resident manager by 1841.

These stations were all large, varying from 25,600 hectares at Bland, to 11,360 hectares at Back Creek. They were all vulnerable to drought and the protracted drought of 1849 to 1852 presented great problems. The description of the drought by an eye-witness [the future Mrs Denis Regan] is still powerful today:

There were no springs to supplement the surface water so, to sink for water was useless. One by one the squatters went, but not until their own lives were in danger, and their stock died of thirst...What a scene of desolation it was! Only a few saddle horses remained, and these had been watered at the house-hold tanks till they too gave out, and then the squatters and their families rode away, taking with them the last drops of water from their tanks. Birds died in thousands and dropped like berries from withered trees.45

The only squatter to remain in 1851 was Abel Bourke of Bland Creek and he survived only because of his accidental discovery of the only permanent spring in the district near Curraburrama homestead [a lasting boon to the region]. The first squatters to return in 1852 were the three Regan brothers. In July, Denis married Sarah White [the first white child born at Young in 1830 and the author of the above quotation]. They settled down at The Bland station, where Harriet Regan had died in 1844. Eighteen months later, in 1854, his brother William Regan married Sarah’s sister Eliza and settled to manage Bland Creek next door. The two couples shared a single homestead at Bland for the next six years. John, the third Regan brother, ‘a man who hated to have a boss’, left the Bland to explore the area: he opened up 12,800 hectares at Merringreen in the Ungarie area and the Merool to the south-west. The properties which John Regan prospected were taken up in the years from 1853 to 1861 by new pastoralists, such as Carlo Marino at Bolagamy and the American Negro known as Black Sims at The Merool. Moses Beard, once at The Bland, moved out to Merool Creek station, the nephew of the explorer Hamilton Hume took up Mandamah West and William Marshall established the large station of Buddigower on Merool Creek.

All these properties lay within the Lachlan Pastoral District, set up in 1839 to control settlement between the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee. The part of the central plain north of the Lachlan came within the Wellington Pastoral District. The largest stations of the north-west in the 1840s were Benjamin Boyd’s 60,000 hectares centred on Condobolin, but these were broken up because of Boyd’s financial difficulties after 1849. By 1849 there were some fifty runs with frontages to the Lachlan River in the two relevant Pastoral Districts. One of the most significant settlers was Thomas Kite, one of the original settlers in Bathurst in 1818, who in 1848 held Cobong and Burrawang to the north of the Lachlan and Wardry, Wallamundry and Bolambe to the south, totalling over 60,000 hectares.
The principal purpose of these early stations was raising cattle. An increasing amount of Victorian money was invested around the Lachlan plains and a route to market developed naturally southwards to the Murray and thence to Melbourne: the Lachlan plain did not, however, develop the strong Victorian affinities of the Riverina or the far South Coast, but remained ambiguously distant both from Sydney and from Melbourne. It was, however, a Riverina grazier, Augustus Morris, who made the first decisive step towards replacing the predominance of cattle by sheep on Burrawang and, to the west, Mulgathere in 1861: although the Lachlan Pastoral District as a whole had had a ration of sheep to cattle of almost 2:1 as early as 1839, the bulk of these sheep had been in the Murrumbidgee region to the south and in 1850 the large majority of Lachlan runs had had no sheep at all.

When Hanbury Clements settled at Eugowra, right on the eastern border of the plain, in 1857, he brought sheep with him from Bathurst and by 1878 there were 12,000 sheep on Eugowra. At Burrawang to the west, Morris' introduction of an initial 30,000 sheep in 1861 was even more significant and within five years Morris was grazing half a million sheep on his river frontages there. Other landholders followed suit and as a result the great wooden shearing sheds which are today such a feature of the Lachlan were constructed throughout the region: most of these sheds were originally built in the 1860s and 1870s and are highly significant evidence of the change in stocking practices in the mid-Victorian period. Thus the great shed at Burrawang dates from 1875; it originally contained 101 stands, later reduced with mechanisation to 88. Interest in quality of sheep stock was also evident: Thomas Edols, Morris' successor at Burrawang, bought 300 rams from Nicholas Bayley's famous Havilah stud near Mudgee and set up his own breeding programme.

Similar developments took place in the extreme west of the region round Lake Cargelligo. This 'noble lake' which Oxley had admired in 1817 had become in the dry year of 1836 largely 'a plain covered with luxuriant grass', as described by Mitchell, but the water still supported mussels and the area was covered by black swans, pelicans and ducks. In 1841 Francis Oakes was licensed to run cattle on Gagelluga (i.e. Cargelligo) and the following year Owen O'Neill took up Wooyeo; both runs had an estimated capacity of 1200 cattle and three more runs were in existence by 1848. By this time the brothers Daniel and Sylvester O'Sullivan had become lessees of Cargelligo and by 1865 they had a dozen other runs in the west totalling 144,000 hectares. These runs, like those further east, also increasingly stocked sheep: in 1873 the new owners of Wooyeo commissioned the prominent Riverina builder William McFadzean to construct a woolshed. This woolshed was never completed for an entirely new element entered Cargelligo history while McFadzean was digging post-holes.

GOLD
This new element was gold. The Lake Cargelligo strike in 1873 was the fourth of six major goldrushes on the Lachlan plain between 1861 and 1894. Although the mineral wealth of the region is far less diverse and archaeologically significant than the concentration of mining sites on the Central Tableland, the gold discoveries in the Lachlan plain had rather greater significance in creating almost all the major towns of that area. The principal towns of the Central Tableland - Lithgow, Bathurst, Blayney, Cowra, Orange, Wellington, Mudgee, Rylstone - were not created primarily because of gold discoveries. By contrast Forbes, Grenfell, Parkes, Lake Cargelligo, Peak Hill, Wyalong and West Wyalong all owe their existence and early growth primarily to gold. Of the major towns of the Central Plain only Condobolin, Ungarie and Bogan Gate grew only out of the needs of farmers for a market and social centre.

The earliest goldrush was at Forbes, in 1861, starting on Thomas Rankin's Bugabigal station, now the site of Lachlan Vintage Village. Alluvial and reef mining began almost simultaneously, although water seepage into the short shafts dug into the gravel beds made alluvial mining particularly uncomfortable. Some 28,000 miners and their support staff were in a canvas town within months of the discovery. The usual stores, banks and even two theatres were thrown up quickly. The township of Forbes was born. Although many miners went off to other finds just to the north, at Tichborne and Currajong (the
future Parkes), the miners prospered for a time and the future of the town was assured by closer cultivation and a diversified use of the land, while renewed success in gold-winning from the 1890s until World War I confirmed some of the original optimism of the miners.

As Forbes' first rush faded in 1866 a shepherd called Con O'Brien found gold on Brundah station. By January 1867 5,000 people had established a mining community called successively Weddin Mountain, Emu Creek and Grenfell [after a gold commissioner recently murdered by bushrangers]. During 1867 some 25,000 men were tempted to Grenfell, 56 dams were constructed for gold-washing and 26 reefs were exploited, most notably the Homeward Bound and the Lucknow. As at Forbes, alluvial gravels also tempted miners: these gravels still extend 20 metres below George Street in Grenfell today. Thirteen stamp batteries were erected, including two of twenty heads: the total capacity was 161 heads and two berdan pans. But, like most rushes, it did not last and actively declined after 1870. Between 1867 and 1871 production at Grenfell had been the most impressive in the state, but from 1874 until 1882 it slackened and petered out by 1884.

Discoveries around Parkes had tempted away the more volatile miners. This area had developed gold fever slowly. The mines at Currajong, just north of modern Parkes, had opened in 1863 and 1864, including Bushmans and Dayspring, but the field was largely replaced by orchards and vineyards by 1867. It was only in 1871 that Thomas Hall Brogden's rich alluvial lead called Bushmans was profitably developed. The Welcome and the Tearaway produced large alluvial nuggets in 1872-3, Henry Parkes visited the incipient township of Bushmans and it was rechristened Parkes at the end of 1873. The opening of new mines in and around Parkes in 1874-5 confirmed the movement of miners away from Grenfell, deeper reefs were exploited at Bushmans in 1877, the Bonnie Dundee mine was a dazzling new success in 1878 and prosperity continued at old and new mines up to 1907, while the improved cyanide processes used in the early twentieth century allowed some profit to be made as late as World War I.

Outside Parkes, mines at Tichborne had some success in the 1870s and a town called Mcguigan's had a dramatic butterfly life from March 1874 until March 1876: in March 1874 miners flocked from Grenfell and elsewhere to Peter McGuigan's gold strike. By June there were 10,000 people. In 1875 there were nine stores in the new town's main street, a billiard saloon, a brewery, eight hotels, a post-office and a photographer. In March 1876 the site of McGuigan's was deserted and every bark or slab but had disappeared. McGuigan's is the classic fly-by-night gold town and its site (2 kilometres northwest of Tichborne) is likely to have archaeological potential.

Lake Cargelligo in the far west of the region had a rather more tangible success. Gold was found in the pine scrub near the lake in April 1873 by a burr-cutter's cook called Mrs Foster: Foster's reef preserved the memory of this observant lady for decades. Wooyoo station came to a standstill and William McFadzean, instead of erecting yet another woolshed, became for a time a principal prospector. By July there were only 200 people and three stores, but the field gained some momentum as the main shaft went deeper and deeper in 1874-8. The twelve-head stamp battery erected in 1875 began serious crushing in January 1877 when the shaft was 50 metres down. The four gold leases surveyed at Lake Cargelligo in 1878 produced an unremarkable amount and by 1884 gold production was over (although some abortive attempts were made again in 1903-4 and 1915-16). From 1873 until 1880 an area of some 54,400 hectares had been reserved from settlement as a goldfield. In 1880, since the gold was petering out, 12,000 of these hectares were made available for small settlers to take up 64 or 128 hectare blocks under conditional lease or purchase: the town of Lake Cargelligo which had been from 1873 to 1880 'a mining centre surrounded by stock runs' (Figure 9.1) now became a well established town surrounded by farms as well as runs.

Two more major gold strikes were still to be made. Peak Hill, in the northeast corner of the region, was an underpopulated area of large sheep runs in the 1870s and 1880s, inhabited largely by shepherds who had to protect their flocks from an unusual concentration of dingoes. Miners had
come to the district immediately to the north (in the Darling Plains region) when gold was found at Tomingley in the mid 1880s. Four prospectors found payable gold on Peak Hill in July 1889 and a township promptly appeared straggling down the line of the lead in ‘Struggle Street’. The town of Peak Hill was proclaimed on 30 November 1889, the Golden Hole was opened by the seven ‘New Chums’ the following September and 10,000 miners appeared from nowhere. Five new mines were opened and a fifteen-head stamp battery was brought from Tambaroora in 1891. The town grew rapidly; 77 children were attending the school in 1890 and the Peak Hill Times appeared in the same year. William Morris Hughes honed his political skills in the early 1890s as he pushed his wheelbarrow around, sharpening knives and mending umbrellas as the higgledy-piggledy township was rearranged into Euchie Street and Mingelo Street (Figure 9.2).

The final flurry of gold came at Wyalong in 1893-4. An enterprising family called Neeld with experience on the Victorian goldfields and in sugar mill construction in Fiji had land around West Wyalong; Joseph Neeld found gold in 1893 and his father and three brothers developed claims on the best leads. The usual 10,000 miners were feverishly at work by March 1894 and established a township called Main Camp around the government water tank. The official township, however, was laid out by the surveyor 2.5 kilometres to the east in 1894 and named Wyalong. The new town had a school and post office by June 1894 and a Mechanics’ Institute by 1895: it prospered and was declared a municipality in 1899. Meanwhile Main Camp, where the mining action was, was renamed West Wyalong, surveyed and straightened out in 1895.

The gold mines were exceedingly prosperous from 1895 until 1905, peaking in 1899 at almost 45,000 ounces. In 1900 they employed 1,900 men, but by 1905 there were only 462, and by 1910 a mere 150. The mining virtually ceased in 1920. Because of technical problems with sulphide ores, chlorination and cyanide plants were used from the 1890s onwards, allowed the economic reworking of tailings.

### Chart of Gold Centres in the Region

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### CLOSER SETTLEMENT AND THE RAILWAY

The end of the goldrushes on the Lachlan Plain coincided with important changes in rural settlement and the exploitation of the land. The Land Act of 1884 had encouraged smaller units of mixed farming and the Homestead Selection Act of 1895 encouraged wheat growing. The twentieth century saw the transformation of a region that had been dominated by cattle, sheep and gold into an area characterised by wheat, wool and fat lambs served by new rail links and by substantial towns surviving the decay of mining which had been their initial stimulus.

In particular the effect of really close settlement after World War I with soldier settlers a dominant theme was initially of mixed success, but as properties were consolidated into more economic sizes in the 1930s the region developed into a major sheep-wheat farming area.

The railway played an important role. Forbes and Parkes were linked to Sydney through Molong in 1893. The main southern line, however, bypassed the central plain, running from Cowra to Young and Cootamundra on its way to Melbourne. Grenfell had to fight hard from 1894 until 1901 to have a branch line built to join the southern line at Koorawatha. Meanwhile the line from Parkes was extended first to Bogan Gate and then in 1898 to Condobolin. In 1903, Wyalong and West Wyalong (with a railway station built between the competing townships) were linked to Temora (and therefore to Griffith and Hay and indirectly to Melbourne). Lake Cargelligo was joined to this rail system in 1917 when a spur through Ungarie terminating at Cargelligo was completed. The line from Ungarie west to Naradhan was opened in 1929. These numerous rail links across the plain
were further developed with a line from Wyalong north to Lake Cowal and Burcher and a line west from Barmedman to Rankins Springs through Tallimba and Weethalle on the Western Highway.

All this made feasible the bulk transportation of wheat. The railway report of 1922 remarked that "since construction of the Wyalong-Lake Cargelligo line in 1917, 11,000 acres [4,000 hectares] south of Ungarie have been divided into farms from 600 to 1,200 acres [240 to 480 hectares]. Of these 9,000 acres [3,600 hectares] have been put under wheat" with a satisfactory average yield of sixteen bushels to the acre. Barmedman station was reserved for soldier settlement and there was much closer settlement in the Wyalong area.

AGRICULTURE
Around Parkes, in the former Goobang shire, more than a third of the shire had been cleared for agriculture by 1933. The area under wheat exceeded 120,000 hectares in 1930 and 1947-8, with fluctuations down to 84,000 in 1931 and 96,000 hectares in 1948. The yield, 20 or 23 bushels per acre, in Goobang shire was significantly higher than in the south and much higher than in the west. At Lake Cargelligo, the area under wheat was only 1,080 hectares in 1900. In 1921, four years after the railway to Wyalong opened, the area under wheat rose to 6,400; the yield was often under ten bushels an acre.

The extension of cereal agriculture had corollaries. Far more clearing was undertaken, mainly employing Chinese ring-barkers. Sheep, though an essential element in the wheat-sheep economy, declined in numbers because of the acreage turned over to wheat; cattle, never an unimportant sub-element, actually increased in number in many parts. Interest in the health of cattle was keen in the region because of John Alexander Gunn. Gunn was the manager at Yalgogrin, west of West Wyalong: at the homestead he set up a laboratory in the 1890s in which he prepared the first successful anthrax serum, produced commercially in collaboration with McGarvie Smith.

Wheat-growing encouraged the development of flourmills. Steam-mills, grinding with stones, had been in the region since the mid-nineteenth century. Tom Cottome, writing from Grenfell to his brother-in-law in Bermuda in 1877, gave a very clear description of mixed farming at that time:

Small farmers, men who take up two or three hundred acres, combine cereal growing, i.e. corn, wheat, oats & hay with the keeping a small flock of sheep. The sheep manure a considerable portion of the land by being judiciously camped & find the selector in meat & a decent little cheque once a year for the wool. He gets his wheat ground at the nearest mill & sells his produce at the nearest town. 41

These small local mills were replaced in the 1890s and early 1900s by roller-machinery mills of higher output in centres such as Forbes, Parkes, Grenfell and Condobolin.

Agricultural shows became a feature of the principal centres, with local Pastoral, Agricultural and Horticultural societies: shows began at Forbes in 1872, at Grenfell in 1876, at Parkes in 1881, at Condobolin in 1885 and at Bogan Gate in 1907.

FORESTRY
The timber industry rather unexpectedly flourished despite all the enthusiasm for clearing land. The Department of Lands declared a whole series of timber reserves in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, a time when natural regeneration of white cypress pine was quite exceptional. The reforestation of thousands of acres in the Ungarie district in the 1880s and 1890s led to State Forests of cypress pine being declared between 1915 and 1922. In the first half of the twentieth century there is said to have been no comparable regeneration but in 1952 the climatic and other conditions were ideal and grazing land reverted to dense scrub. It has been suggested that this is not the natural vegetation, which seems to have been savannah woodland in the earlier nineteenth century, as on the foothills of the
Weddin Mountains National Park. At Wyalong a very viable eucalyptus oil business flourished in the twentieth century, using blue mallee (grown in commercial plantation since the 1970s).

1930 ONWARDS
The entire region shared the problems of the 1930s with the Depression hitting small farmers severely. The schools that had sprung up in the 1920s to cater for rapidly expanding families throughout the more densely settled region saw declining rolls: Wargambegal, for instance, a typical soldier settlement of the 1920s, opened its school in 1929 and reached a maximum of 36 pupils soon after; by 1944 it was closed. At Gubbata the 38 homesteads balloted in 1929 were reduced to only seven farms by 1960.

The Rural Reconstruction Board founded in 1932 assisted in the painful adjustments of the Depression and the changes during World War II so that the farming community was better able to prosper in post-war conditions. The major agricultural machinery firm, Mitchell and Co. of Footscray in Victoria opened its New South Wales plant in Parkes in 1925, while the Small Arms Factory did for Parkes in World War II what a similar factory did for Lithgow in both wars. The Australian National Radio Telescope opened at Parkes in 1961. The routing of the standard gauge railway, from Sydney to Perth through Parkes and Condobolin in 1970, gave a further communications link, together with servicing work for Australian Railways.

CONCLUSION
Despite recurrent drought and flood, the Lachlan plain, with its great central waterway, provided economic and spiritual well-being for a large Aboriginal population. It has also provided sheep and cattle grazing for large European properties. In the last hundred years these have changed to combined agricultural and pastoral holdings of a more modest size. The area became criss-crossed with branch railway lines in the forty years after 1893 and the wheat industry at last found a ready access to markets. Mineral wealth had been found sporadically, most notably at Grenfell in the 1860s, Parkes in the later century and at Peak Hill and Wyalong in the 1890s and early 1900s, but this phase was over by World War I. The heritage of the region has many strengths: Wiradjuri sites of significance, early homesteads and fine woolsheds, mining sites of the later nineteenth century and substantial country towns with their public amenities, important building stock and their railheads beside stockyards and wheat silos.

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16 Camm and McQuilton, op.cit., 44.
17 Musgrave, op.cit., 37.
18 Ibid, 56.
FIG 9.1. THE VILLAGE-PLAN OF LAKE CARGELLIGO IN 1878

Showing the four mining leases, GL 1 to GL 4. The site of the station after the railway came in 1917 is superimposed on the bottom left, cutting across GL 4. Note the stamp-battery down by the lake, together with a blacksmith's shop and a wheelwright's shop. The seven huts, the house and the cottage marked have no relation to the planned village.


FIG 9.2. PEAK HILL VILLAGE IN 1890

Showing the street plan proposed by the surveyor.

Source: J. Jackson Historical notes on the earliest days of Peak Hill and district. 1939, 3.